

In 2015, Bangladesh made a moderate advancement in its efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Government published the results of the 2013 National Child Labor Survey and approved the Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy which will set the minimum age for domestic work at 14 years. The National Child Labor Welfare Council as well as two Divisional Child Labor Welfare Councils met for the first time to discuss child labor elimination activities. However, children in Bangladesh are engaged in the worst forms of child labor, including in the production of bricks and forced child labor in the production of dried fish. The legal framework does not protect children working in informal economic sectors, including small farms and street work, where child labor is most prevalent. The law does not specify the activities and number of hours per week of light work that are permitted for children that are 12 and 13 years of age. The Government lacks the capacity to enforce child labor laws as the number of labor inspectors is insufficient for the size of Bangladesh's workforce and fines are inadequate to deter child labor law violations.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Bangladesh are engaged in the worst forms of child labor, including in the production of bricks and forced child labor in the production of dried fish.(1-3) The Government published its 2013 National Child Labor Survey during the reporting period. The survey data show that 1,698,894 children ages 5 to 17 are engaged in legally prohibited child labor, while 1,751,475 children are engaged in permitted forms of work.(4) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Bangladesh.

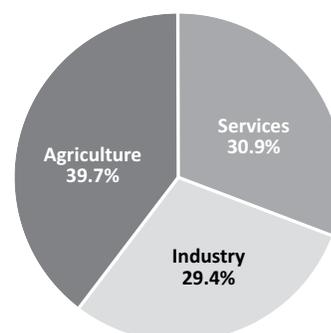
Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5-14 yrs.	4.3 (1,326,411)
Attending School (%)	5-14 yrs.	81.2
Combining Work and School (%)	7-14 yrs.	6.8
Primary Completion Rate (%)		73.5

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2011, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2015.(5)

Source for all other data: Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis of statistics from Child Labor Survey, 2013.(6) Data on working children, school attendance, and children combining work and school are not comparable with data published in the previous version of this report because of differences between surveys used to collect the data.

Figure 1. Working Children by Sector, Ages 5-14



Based on a review of available information, Table 2 provides an overview of children's work by sector and activity.

Table 2. Overview of Children's Work by Sector and Activity

Sector/Industry	Activity
Agriculture	Farming, including harvesting and processing crops,* raising poultry, grazing cattle,* gathering honey,* and harvesting tea leaves* (4, 7-11)
	Fishing* and drying fish (4, 7, 8)
	Harvesting and processing shrimp (10, 12, 13)

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Table 2. Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity (cont)

Sector/Industry	Activity
Industry	Quarrying and mining, including salt† (4, 8, 14)
	Producing garments, textiles, jute textiles, leather,† footwear,† and imitation jewelry*† (8, 10, 15-19)
	Manufacturing bricks,† glass,† hand-rolled cigarettes (<i>bidis</i>),† matches,† soap,† steel furniture,† aluminum products,*† plastic products,*† and melamine products* (1, 3, 4, 8, 10, 18, 20, 21)
	Ship breaking† (10, 22, 23)
	Carpentry,* welding,*† and construction*† (4, 7, 10, 24)
Services	Domestic work (25-27)
	Working in transportation, pulling rickshaws,* and street work, including garbage picking, recycling,*† vending, begging, and portering (4, 7, 10, 14, 28)
	Working in hotels,* restaurants,* bakeries,*† and retail shops* (4, 10, 14, 18, 24)
	Repairing automobiles*† (10, 14, 24)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Forced labor in the drying of fish and the production of bricks* (2, 11, 29-31)
	Forced begging* (31, 32)
	Use in illicit activities, including drug dealing* (11)
	Commercial sexual exploitation,* sometimes as a result of human trafficking* (10, 31, 33, 34)
	Forced domestic work (11, 31, 35)

* Evidence of this activity is limited and/or the extent of the problem is unknown.

† Determined by national law or regulation as hazardous and, as such, relevant to Article 3(d) of ILO C. 182.

‡ Child labor understood as the worst forms of child labor *per se* under Article 3(a)–(c) of ILO C. 182.

Some Bangladeshi children are trafficked internally, and others are trafficked to India and Pakistan for commercial sexual exploitation.(31) Some children in Bangladesh work under forced labor conditions in the dried fish sector and in the production of bricks to help pay off family debts to local moneylenders.(29, 31) Children are forced to beg on the streets, including some who have been kidnapped by gangs.(32)

According to the National Education Policy, education is free and compulsory in Bangladesh through eighth grade, but several factors contribute to children not completing primary school, such as high student-teacher ratios and short school days of only 2 to 3 hours. The associated costs of education, including books and uniforms, also prevent many children from attending school.(4, 36)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

Bangladesh has ratified most key international conventions concerning child labor (Table 3).

Table 3. Ratification of International Conventions on Child Labor

Convention	Ratification
 ILO C. 138, Minimum Age	
ILO C. 182, Worst Forms of Child Labor	✓
 UN CRC	✓
UN CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict	✓
UN CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography	✓
 Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons	

The Government has established laws and regulations related to child labor, including its worst forms (Table 4).

Table 4. Laws and Regulations Related to Child Labor

Standard	Yes/No	Age	Related Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	14	Section 34 of the Bangladesh Labor Act (37)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Sections 39–42 of the Bangladesh Labor Act (37)
Prohibition of Hazardous Occupations or Activities for Children	Yes		Sections 39–42 of the Bangladesh Labor Act; Statutory Regulatory Order Number 65 (37, 38)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Sections 370 and 374 of the Penal Code; Sections 3, 6, and 9 of the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act (39, 40)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Sections 3 and 6 of the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act; Section 6 of the Suppression of Violence Against Women and Children Act (40, 41)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Sections 372 and 373 of the Penal Code; Sections 78 and 80 of the Children's Act; Section 3 of the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act; Section 8 of the Pornography Control Act (39, 40, 42, 43)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	No		Section 79 of the Children's Act (42)
Minimum Age for Compulsory Military Service	N/A*		
Minimum Age for Voluntary Military Service	Yes	16, 17	Air Force and Army regulation titles unknown (44, 45)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	11	Section 2 of the Primary Education (Compulsory) Act (46)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 17 of the Constitution (47)

* No conscription (48)

The Bangladesh Labor Act excludes the informal economic sectors in which child labor is most prevalent, including domestic work, street work, and work on small agricultural farms with less than five employees.(37, 43, 49)

Although the labor law stipulates that children over 12 years of age may engage in light work that does not endanger their health or interfere with their education, the law does not specify the activities or the number of hours per week that light work is permitted.(37)

The use of children in pornographic performances is not criminally prohibited.(40, 43) The use of children in the production of drugs is not criminally prohibited.(42)

The 2010 National Education Policy raised the age of compulsory education from grade 5 (age 10) to grade 8 (age 14); however, until the legal framework is amended to reflect the new compulsory education age, the policy is not enforceable.(50, 51)

III. ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

The Government has established institutional mechanisms for the enforcement of laws and regulations on child labor, including its worst forms (Table 5).

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments, Ministry of Labor and Employment	Enforce labor laws, including those relating to child labor and hazardous child labor.(52)
Bangladesh Police	Enforce Penal Code provisions protecting children from forced labor and commercial sexual exploitation.(49, 53)
Bangladesh Labor Court	Prosecute labor law cases, including child labor law violations. Impose fines or sanctions against employers that violate labor laws.(54)
TIP Monitoring Cell of Bangladesh Police	Investigate cases of human trafficking, forced labor, and commercial sexual exploitation, including those involving children. Enforce anti-trafficking provisions of the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act.(55)

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Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement (cont)

Organization/Agency	Role
Child Protection Networks	Respond to a broad spectrum of violations against children, including child labor. Comprises officials from various agencies with mandates to protect children, prosecute violations, monitor interventions, and develop referral mechanisms at the district and subdistrict levels between law enforcement and social welfare services.(7)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2015, labor law enforcement agencies in Bangladesh took actions to combat child labor, including its worst forms (Table 6).

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2014	2015
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$2.9 million (52)	\$4.1 million (11)
Number of Labor Inspectors	194 (43)	284 (11)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	No (54)	No (54)
Training for Labor Inspectors		
■ Initial Training for New Employees	Unknown	Yes (11)
■ Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A	N/A
■ Refresher Courses Provided	No (43)	Yes (11)
Number of Labor Inspections	25,525 (43)	31,836 (43)
■ Number Conducted at Worksite	25,525 (43)	31,836 (43)
■ Number Conducted by Desk Reviews	Unknown	Unknown
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	6 (54)	40 (43)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown (54)	Unknown (54)
■ Number of Penalties Imposed That Were Collected	Unknown (54)	Unknown (54)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (56)	Yes (11)
■ Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (56)	Yes (11)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (56)	Yes (11)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (56)	Yes (11)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (52)	Yes (52)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	No (52)	No (52)

In 2015, the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) provided training to labor inspectors on building and fire safety, occupational safety and health, and labor laws, which included child labor laws.(11)

Although DIFE hired 90 additional labor inspectors during 2015, the number of labor inspectors is still insufficient for the size of Bangladesh's workforce.(11) According to the ILO standard of 1 inspector for every 40,000 workers in less developed economies, Bangladesh should employ about 2,000 inspectors to adequately enforce labor laws throughout the country.(57-59) Reports indicate that inspections rarely occur at unregistered factories and establishments, places where children are more likely to be employed.(12, 60)

The penalty of a \$62 fine for a child labor law violation is an insufficient deterrent.(7, 56) According to the Ministry of Labor and Employment, information on penalties imposed and fines collected resides with the labor courts; however, research did not reveal information about penalties.(54)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2015, criminal law enforcement agencies in Bangladesh took actions to combat the worst forms of child labor (Table 7).

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2014	2015
Training for Investigators		
■ Initial Training for New Employees	Unknown	Unknown
■ Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A	N/A
■ Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (61)	Yes (62)
Number of Investigations	Unknown	Unknown
Number of Violations Found	Unknown	178 (63)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown	Unknown
Number of Convictions	Unknown	Unknown
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (52, 61, 64)	Yes (52)

In 2015, the Ministry of Home Affairs, in coordination with IOM, UNICEF, and UNODC, conducted anti-human-trafficking training for law enforcement officials.(62)

The TIP Monitoring Cell of the Bangladesh Police reportedly has insufficient funds and staff to adequately address cases of child trafficking, forced child labor, and commercial sexual exploitation of children.(61)

The Bangladesh Police report that from February to December 2015 there were 982 cases of human trafficking and 1 conviction for crimes involving human trafficking. Disaggregated data for investigations and convictions involving child victims are not provided. (63) The police also report that 110 children were recovered from human trafficking during the same time period.(63)

IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

The Government has established mechanisms to coordinate its efforts to address child labor, including its worst forms (Table 8).

Table 8. Mechanisms to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
National Child Labor Welfare Council	Coordinate efforts undertaken by various government agencies to eliminate child labor and assess the implementation of the National Child Labor Elimination Policy provide advice. Chaired by the Ministry of Labor and Employment, comprises officials representing relevant government ministries, international organizations, child advocacy groups, and employer and worker organizations.(65) The Council held its first meeting in May 2015.(66)
Counter-Trafficking National Coordination Committee, Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)	Coordinate government ministries involved in countering international and domestic human trafficking, including child trafficking.(55) Integrate the work of government agencies and international and local NGOs on human trafficking through bimonthly coordination meetings. Oversee district counter-trafficking committees, which oversee counter-trafficking committees for subdistricts and for smaller administrative units.(55, 64, 67)
Rescue, Recovery, Repatriation, and Integration Task Force, MHA	Coordinate Bangladesh and India's efforts to rescue, recover, repatriate, and reintegrate victims of human trafficking, particularly children. Liaise with various ministries, government departments, NGOs, and international organizations that assist trafficked children.(64, 68)

In 2015, Divisional Child Labor Welfare Councils in Chittagong and Rangpur met for the first time to discuss child labor elimination activities.(11)

V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

The Government of Bangladesh has established policies related to child labor, including its worst forms (Table 9).

Table 9. Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
National Child Labor Elimination Policy (NCLEP) (2010–2015)	Guides law making and policy making to eliminate the worst forms of child labor through interventions that will remove children from the worst forms of child labor and provide them with viable work alternatives.(69, 70)
Child Labor National Plan of Action (NPA) (2012–2016)	Identifies strategies for implementing and mainstreaming the NCLEP, including developing institutional capacity, increasing access to education and health services, raising social awareness, strengthening law enforcement, and creating prevention and reintegration programs.(71)

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Table 9. Policies Related to Child Labor (cont)

Policy	Description
Sixth Five-Year Plan (2011–2015)	Includes the elimination of child labor as a Government priority and identifies the NCLEP and its NPA as the Government’s central strategy to eliminate child labor.(72)
National Plan of Action to Combat Human Trafficking (2015–2017)†	Establishes goals to meet international standards and best practices for anti-human-trafficking initiatives, including prevention of human trafficking; protection of survivors and victims of human trafficking; legal justice for survivors and victims of human trafficking; development of advocacy networks; and establishment of an effective monitoring, evaluation, and reporting mechanism.(55)
National Labor Policy	Includes provisions on the prohibition of child labor in the informal and formal employment sectors in urban and rural areas. States that the Government will take necessary actions to ensure that children do not engage in hazardous labor and aims to create opportunities for children to access primary education.(73)
National Education Policy*	Specifies the Government’s education policy, including pre-primary, primary, secondary, vocational and technical, higher, and non-formal education policies. Increases the compulsory age for free education to grade 8 (age 14).(51)
National Plan of Action for Education for All (2003–2015)	Includes provisions that target child laborers for non-formal basic education programs.(74)
National Skills Development Policy	Outlines a skills development program for legally working-age children as a means of contributing to a workplace free from child labor.(75)
National Policy for Children	Aims to mitigate child labor by implementing steps set out in the NCLEP strategies for eliminating child labor.(76)

* Child labor elimination and prevention strategies do not appear to have been integrated into this policy.

† Policy was approved during the reporting period.

In 2015, the Government approved the Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy, which will come into effect in 2016. (11, 77) The policy sets the minimum age for domestic work at 14 years; however, children between ages 12 and 13 can work as domestic workers with parental permission.(11) The policy, however, is not legally enforceable.(43)

During the year, the Government also approved the Seventh Five-Year Plan, which lays out actions to be taken by the Government to reduce child labor and eliminate the worst forms of child labor.(78)

In 2014, the Government drafted the National Corporate Social Responsibility Policy for Children that will provide guidance to businesses in the formal and non-formal sector on how to respect and protect the rights of children.(36, 79)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2015, the Government of Bangladesh funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor, including its worst forms (Table 10).

Table 10. Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
Eradication of Hazardous Child Labor, Phase III†	Three-year Government program that targets 50,000 children between ages 10 and 14 for withdrawal from hazardous labor through non-formal education and skills development training.(69, 80)
Services for Children at Risk Project†	Ministry of Social Welfare (MSW) 5-year program that provides integrated child protection services to children engaged in child labor, including its worst forms.(52) The program has provided services to 2,692 children, including non-formal education, skills development education, and livelihood training.(35)
Urban Social Protection Initiative to Reach the Unreachable and Invisible and Ending Child Labor	UNICEF, MSW, and the Ministry of Women and Children’s Affairs (MWCA) 5-year project that provides conditional cash transfers and employment training, outreach and referral services, and social protection services for 500,000 children and 30,000 adolescents.(10, 81)
Reaching Out-of-School Children II (2012–2017)	\$130 million World Bank-funded, 6-year program that provides out-of-school children with non-formal education, school stipends, free books, and school uniforms. Students attend learning centers called Ananda Schools until they are ready to join mainstream secondary schools.(82) As of June 2015, the program has provided education to 546,000 poor children in 20,162 learning centers.(83)

Table 10. Social Programs to Address Child Labor (cont)

Program	Description
Child Sensitive Social Protection Project (2012–2016)	UNICEF-funded MSW program to reduce abuse, violence, and exploitation of children and youth by improving access to social protection services.(52) Provides conditional cash transfers of \$26 each month for 18 months for underprivileged children to prevent them from working in child labor.(35) Services also include a stipend program for out-of-school adolescents.(84)
Enabling Environment for Child Rights	MWCA program, supported by UNICEF, that rehabilitates street children engaged in risky work. Supports 16,000 children in 20 districts through cash transfers.(36, 85) In 2015, the project launched a pilot initiative to provide 500 additional children in the Dhaka slums with assistance through mobile phone cash transfer.(85)
Primary Education Stipend Project, Phase III†	Ministry of Primary and Mass Education-implemented program that provides stipends to the children of poor families throughout Bangladesh in an effort to reduce child labor and mitigate the cost of education.(11)
Support Urban Slum Children to Access Inclusive Non-Formal Education	EU-funded program implemented by Save the Children to provide non-formal education to children in the urban slums of Dhaka and Chittagong and to mainstream students into the formal education system.(11)
Country Level Engagement and Assistance to Reduce (CLEAR) Child Labor Project	USDOL-funded, capacity-building project implemented by the ILO in at least 10 countries to build local and national capacity of the Government to address child labor. Aims to improve legislation addressing child labor issues, including by bringing local or national laws into compliance with international standards; improve monitoring and enforcement of laws and policies related to child labor; develop, validate, adopt, and implement a National Action Plan on the elimination of child labor; and enhance the implementation of national and local policies and programs aimed at the reduction and prevention of child labor in Bangladesh.(66)
Expanding the Evidence Base and Reinforcing Policy Research for Scaling-up and Accelerating Action Against Child Labor	USDOL-funded research project implemented by the ILO in 7 countries, including Bangladesh, to accelerate country level actions to address child labor by collecting new data, analyzing existing data, building capacity of governments to conduct research in this area, and supporting governments, social partners and other stakeholders to identify areas of policy intervention against child labor.(86) The Government's Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, in consultation with the ILO, drafted and published the National Child Labor Survey.(86)
Shelter Project†	MSW-administered support services for vulnerable people who have experienced violence, including human trafficking. Includes nine multipurpose shelters and eight crisis centers that provide services to women and children.(31, 52)
Child Help Line 1098	MSW-implemented and UNICEF-supported 24-hour emergency telephone line. Connects children at risk to social protection services.(87)
National Helpline Center†	National Helpline Center for Violence Against Women and Children-operated 24/7, toll-free hotline. Provides support and guidance to children involved in violent and hazardous situations.(52)
Vulnerable Group Development Program†	MWCA program that provides vulnerable families with food assistance and training in alternative income-generating opportunities.(70, 88, 89)

† Program is funded by the Government of Bangladesh.

VII. SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

Based on the reporting above, suggested actions are identified that would advance the elimination of child labor, including its worst forms, in Bangladesh (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor, Including its Worst Forms

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ratify the Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons.	2013 – 2015
	Ensure that the law's minimum age protections apply to children working in the informal sector, including in domestic work, on the streets, and in small-scale agriculture.	2009 – 2014
	Ensure that the law specifies the activities and the number of hours per week that children between ages 12 and 13 are permitted to perform light work.	2015
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the use of children in illicit activities, particularly in the production of drugs.	2015
Legal Framework	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits all offenses related to the sexual exploitation of children for pornographic performances.	2015
	Ensure that the legal framework reflects the policy that education is compulsory through grade eight and is consistent with the minimum age for work.	2012 – 2015

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